

Fira Shwartz With Her Mother Rosa Shwartz



My mother Rosa Shwartz and I on my 6th birthday while we were in evacuation in Magnitogorsk in 1942. I was 5 years old when the war began. I remember that my father and I were planning to go for a walk on the slopes of the Dnepr River that Sunday, but in the morning he told me that it was cancelled. I burst into tears, because I was so unhappy about it. My mother cried, too, and I thought that she was disappointed by not going to the park. Only later did I understand that she was crying because of the war. My father was released from service in the army because he was a railroad employee. He also received a railroad carriage at his disposal for the evacuation of his family. We all went to evacuation in this carriage at the beginning of July 1941: my mother's brother Samuel, his wife and daughter Bella, my father's fellow worker, his wife and two children, and our family. Uncle Samuel was not subject to recruitment due to his age. We had very little luggage with us. We only took the most necessary clothing, my toys and children's books, my bed linen and a few casseroles. My father told us that we would return home soon. Uncle Samuel and his family got off the train at Buzuluk station - his acquaintances were living there. We moved on. The train stopped at Magnitogorsk, Cheliabinsk region [2,500 km from Kiev]. We got off there. All evacuated people settled down in the barracks there. There were two families in each room. The so-called 'rooms' were separated by sheets that served as 'partials'. We lived with my father's co-worker, his wife and children. My father worked at the railway station in Magnitogorsk. At the beginning of 1942 he was recruited to the front. He wrote us a single letter from there. A few months later we received the notification of his death. It said that he perished close to the village of Malyie Krestsy, near Leningrad. Regretfully, I have never been to the place where he was buried. My mother and I were starving and freezing because we didn't have any winter clothes with us. I stayed inside the room for the whole winter. My mother had to go out to get some food in exchange for ration cards. She had to stand in long lines for hours and hours. I remember her buying a small fur tree on 31st December 1942. Then she went to the store. She came back with a face white as chalk and put a bag of food on the table. She went to bed saying that she was going to stay there and get warm. She never left the bed again. A week later she died of pneumonia. My mother had asked our co-tenant to write to her brothers. At the beginning of January 1943 Uncle Samuel came to pick me up and take me to Buzuluk. His family became mine.